what Steinbeck could achieve when there was a partly accidental harmony between structure and materials.

Granted that many of Steinbeck's longer fictions are partial or total failures, ambitious in intention but flawed severely in execution, even the very late work is a mingling of excellence and its opposite. Therefore, despite a turning to less ambitious longer fiction and a considerable amount of journalistic work, Steinbeck remained a potentially major novelist up to his death. In itself, this must be a somewhat unique circumstance in American letters.

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